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Hurt To See
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HURT TO SEE

A slight, unsteady hammering is all the street can bear this morning. A little boy's hammer, both claws missing. Neighbor children are driven to Sunday school; his parents prefer sleeping late. Sparrows bathe in the white dust of a depression in the oystershell driveway.

The boy hammers, he wonders how he'll come by a little sister. He asked for one. His mother stirred sugar into a pitcher of cooling tea. Maybe, she said, but she forgot to smile when she said it. By one scuffed knee, the boy has piled creek rocks: each rock he brings home he cracks, because one rock or another will be purple inside, or diamond, sharp as the picture in his father's book of rocks.

Barefoot in the shallow creek with wet pocketfuls of rock, he saw a huge white stork stalking. Storks eat crawfish, they used to bring babies—not anymore. If babies come now, they come in an ambulance. Yesterday he was pulling the shell off a crawfish when his mother's voice hurried out of the upstairs window—as though it hurt to see what he did. Scared, he dropped the animal before looking up. The thin bedroom curtains shivered a little. He heard his father do what—a sneeze? a bad cough? It sounded like he was crying. But father told him when crawfish got too big for their shells they crawled out of them, all soft and new. He just wanted to see if it was true.

The boy brushes the white dust out of his work space, picks another rock. He's hungry, but can keep this up until they yell Breakfast! Between his spraddled legs he's pounded the sidewalk the hardest. The concrete is so cracked and chipped he'll have to smooth rock dust over it to keep his father from seeing, getting mad, making that ugly noise again.